

# LOVE'S ALCHEMY

## Poems from the Sufi Tradition

Translated from the Persian by  
DAVID AND SABRINEH FIDELER



## MORE PRAISE FOR *LOVE'S ALCHEMY*

“This is a gem of a book. David Fideler and Sabrineh Fideler have crafted an enticing introduction to some of the greatest mystical poets of Sufism. Highly recommended.”

— Jay Kinney, editor of *The Inner West*

“The elegant simplicity of the poems makes them a perfect accompaniment to a meditation practice, as well as a wonderful gift idea.”

— *Yogi Times*

“In addition to the richness of the poems themselves, the reader who may be unfamiliar with Persian poetry is given guidance in the book for understanding this type of poetry. The authors provide teaching on understanding Persian poetry in their introduction and helpful endnotes on particular poems, along with a glossary of terms specific to understanding Sufi poetry. Their translations along with the background information provide an amazing introduction for those new to Sufi poetry, and a wonderful resource for those well acquainted with such poetry.”

— *Sufism*

“The Fideler’s translations of the poems, many of which have been brought into English for the first time, are superb and lucid throughout, bringing forth the quintessence of quatrains, ghazals, and other forms of this essential yet elusive verse.”

— *Rain Taxi Review of Books*

“A wonderful introduction.”

— *National Review Network*



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New World Library  
Novato, California



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14 Pamaron Way  
Novato, CA 94949

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Interior design by Tona Pearce Myers

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Love's alchemy : poems from the Sufi tradition / translated by David and Sabrineh Fidler.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-57731-535-3 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-1-57731-890-3 (paperback : alk. paper)

1. Sufi poetry, Persian—Translations into English. I. Fidler, David R., 1961– II. Fidler, Sabrineh, 1972–.

PK6449.E5L684 2006

891'.551009—dc22

2005035207

First printing, December 2009

ISBN 978-1-57731-890-3

Printed in the United States on 30% postconsumer-waste recycled paper



New World Library is a proud member of the Green Press Initiative.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Love existed before heaven or earth.

Love's presence is not from our time.

— Ḥāfīz





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## Introduction

*That which frees you  
from your tiny self*

Nowhere has poetry been more prized for its spiritual and artistic value than in the classical Persian world. A devotion to poetry still permeates Persian culture today: the lyrics of traditional music are made up almost entirely of Sufi mystical poetry by such masters as Rūmī and Ḥāfiz, and many contemporary Persians have memorized dozens of pages of verse by the great writers. Lines quoted from classical poets appear in ordinary conversation; even street peddlers render their sales pitches into verse. In earlier times, court poets were highly rewarded for their works, and the greatest classical poets were the Sufi mystics, whose beautiful, tranquil tombs are still traveled to by thousands each year, partly because of the spiritual blessing (*baraka*) a pilgrim might acquire by visiting such a holy spot.

In short, the poetry of the classical Sufi writers is very much alive, and still regarded as the highest literary art in Persian culture today. Historically, the rhythm and form of this poetry have been so closely intertwined with music, calligraphy, and even sacred architecture, that at first it is difficult for us Westerners to grasp such a beautifully integrated world—a world in which the arts are so thoroughly harmonized with one another, with daily life, and with the deepest human needs. While these arts are surely meant to inspire delight, they are not forms of “entertainment.” All sacred art seeks to open the soul to a direct perception of reality’s spiritual dimension.

Over the last twenty years readers in America and Europe have developed a profound thirst for the compelling work of Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273), which has made Rūmī the best-selling poet in America. Born near the town of Balkh in what is now Afghanistan, Rūmī’s native language was Persian. When he was around the age of ten, his family fled the Mongol invaders and ended up in Konya, Turkey, an important town on the silk route, where Rūmī taught and where his tomb is now located. His great teaching-work, the *Mathnawī*, consisting of rhymed couplets, contains twenty-five thousand verses divided into six books, while his *Dīwān* (collected poems) contains some five thousand separate works—over forty thousand verses. Teaching the spiritual power of love and the divine unity at the heart of reality and the world’s religious paths, Rūmī has become one of the most treasured

voices of spiritual insight in today's world and is by far the best-known Persian poet of all time.

Yet if this volume conveys anything, it is the message that Rūmī is not alone—just an extraordinary representative of a much larger tradition of Persian mystical poetry, which reflects the same themes, the same beauties, the same insights. Persian Sufi poetry is a tradition that spans a thousand years, and in the same way that Rūmī studied and drew on the works of the earlier poets, later poets read and expanded on his work too. But because of the way Rūmī has been presented to modern readers—practically as a lone voice taken out of context—it is easy to overlook the fact that he is part of a living tradition: one that existed before him and continues to the present day.

It is our hope that the works assembled in this collection will help introduce English-speaking readers to the wider tradition that Rūmī represents, to kindred voices who rise to Rūmī's greatness, to other masters of Sufi poetry whose work is cut from the same bolt of spiritual cloth. In order to emphasize the unity of the tradition, we have not arranged the poems either by author, time period, or by theme, but the dates of death of the nearly eighty poets represented here, when they are known, can be located in the index.

With a few exceptions, most of the poems translated here are *rubā'īyāt*, or quatrains: poems only four lines in length, focusing on a central theme or idea. These four-line poems are concise spiritual meditation, or “mystical epigrams,”

that possess a formal structure akin to that of Japanese haiku. Historically, the *rubāʿī* form was the first type of poetry to be used by Persian mystics. Like the other types of Persian poetry, they were sung or recited with music at Sufi gatherings.

## THE LANGUAGE OF PERSIAN MYSTICAL POETRY

All these poems reflect aspects and teachings of a spiritual tradition—the inner, gnostic, or mystical tradition of Islam—known as Sufism or *taṣawwuf* (purification). But, like Rūmī, these poets do not strictly “belong” to Persia, to the Islamic world, or even to Sufism; like Rūmī, they belong to the entire world, and especially to those readers who taste the essence and grasp the spirit of their work. In the words of one poet, “My place is the placeless / my trace is the traceless.” The same could be said of the poetic tradition, for the vision behind these works is ever-living, not bound to a particular people, time, or place.

Persian is a rich, multidimensional language, in which one word can convey a host of meanings and nuances. But the central charm of Persian poetry—and the major stumbling block for noninitiates—is its symbolism. In our modern, secular world, we tend to take things quite literally or at face value; but to the mystics of the world’s spiritual traditions everything contains multiple levels of meaning. In sacred texts, the literal dimension often represents just the outermost husk. This is certainly true of Persian mystical

poetry, which makes use of a complex, meaning-laden vocabulary from the Sufi tradition. Because of this, even a few lines of poetry can encapsulate an entire world of meaning. To really translate such a work into English may require more words and lines than the original, and some symbols do not “translate” at all but must be understood on their own level.

A large percentage of Persian poetry is written in symbolic code. The reader, in turn, is expected to understand the code in order to grasp the full meaning of the poetry. Deeper still, lurking underneath the symbolic code, lies a vision of the structure of reality, the human condition, and the spiritual path, all of which the symbols allude to. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that much of the content of Sufi poetry is meant to be understood before you actually read it! While this system presents certain barriers, it also allows the Sufi poets to transmit great depths of meaning, even in a poem of only four lines. It also provides the reader with an ongoing source of delight—for as the reader’s understanding continues to expand, the same poems can continue to reveal deeper levels of meaning over the course of many years.

The most common symbols are now well known to many readers: wine, prohibited by Islam, refers to divine love and the mystic knowledge it brings. Intoxication or drunkenness refers to divine inebriation, ecstasy, and direct knowledge of the divine. The Beloved or Friend is a reference to God, but it may simultaneously refer to a human being in whom the qualities of the divine are reflected.



So far, so good, but the symbolism can become intricately complex after that. In some poetry, each aspect of the Beloved's face—downy cheeks, mole, lips, tresses of hair, eyebrows—refers to some aspect of ultimate reality. Other meanings also come into play. The Beloved's tress or strand of hair, for instance, acts as a snare: the curl at the end hooks the lover, drawing him to the Beloved, after which, of course, it is all over! In some works the tress of hair is instead likened to a polo stick. The polo ball is the lover's head, which must be offered up on the earth in sacrifice to the Beloved before it can be firmly whacked into another level of perception.

When you read a poem that refers to the "tavern," you must know in advance that the "Tavern of Ruin" (*kharā-bāt*) is the symbolic gathering place of the Sufis. It is the lonely, unfrequented place on the outskirts of town where wine is served, away from mosques; and it is visited by "rogues" or "profligates"—that is, by Sufis or dervishes. In the Tavern of Ruin you drink wine under the guidance of a master, experience intoxication, and pass away from both the egoism of the false self and the illusions that people take for reality. The Tavern of Ruin is the true Sufi meeting place, where one can experience genuine communion with a deeper level of reality.

The symbol of the Tavern became firmly established in Sufi poetry and illustrates just how complex the poetic code became. In every institutionalized religion there are always some people who act piously and sanctimoniously around others, motivated by a type of spiritual arrogance

or egoism rather than by a genuine sense of surrender to the divine. The symbol of the Tavern is the opposite of the mosque and carries a profound meaning. It takes aim at all those individuals—including Sufis—who find in religion a way to inflate their own self-image. The taverngoers, by contrast, are the lowest of the low in their poverty and humility, which makes a genuine type of spirituality possible—one rooted in selflessness. As the poet Ḥāfīz puts it,

Stop acting so holy and putting down the  
taverngoers!  
Another person's sins will never be tallied by you.

Whether I'm good or bad, mind your own  
business!  
In the end, everyone reaps what they have sown.

Each person, whether sober or drunk, seeks the  
Beloved;  
every place is love's home, whether synagogue or  
mosque.

My head surrenders, lying on the bricks of  
the tavern's door . . .  
Stop trying to rob me of heaven's grace.

While most of the poems collected here are fairly straightforward, some require a word of explanation. Notes are provided at the end of the book to explain aspects of the original poems that can't be gracefully brought over in

translation, and we have also provided a glossary of symbols and common terms. Appendix 2 describes the *rubā'ī* form in greater depth, and appendix 1 explains the rules we follow when making translations.

## LOVE'S ALCHEMY

In the Sufi view, the sun can reveal itself in the atom; the ocean can reveal itself in a single drop; and God can reveal himself in the human beloved. Sufism emphasizes the unity of all existence. Once purified, the human heart becomes a mirror that reflects and knows the light of God. Contrary to the puritanical forms of religion that split off divine presence both from the world and from human life, Sufism celebrates divine nearness and intimacy. Rather than being distant and aloof, God is described as the “Beloved” or the “Friend.” Above all, the mystic desires intimacy with God.

In Sufi poetry, we find a conscious blurring of distinctions between human and divine love. They are intertwined. In ecstasy, the human lover loses himself in another; the mystic loses him- or herself in God. The language of love is used by the Sufi poet to express an insatiable longing for divine nearness that would otherwise transcend verbal description.

The very best poems produce a shift in awareness that takes us outside ourselves. In this place, momentarily, time seems to slow down or even to stop. We view life from

another perspective—one that seems strangely familiar, and perhaps even more real, than our casual, day-to-day way of looking at things. In this way, by stepping beyond ourselves into the Tavern of Wonder, we catch a glimpse of our true deeper self, and of our true deeper ties.

While these works explore many aspects of the spiritual path, we have chosen the title *Love's Alchemy* to highlight the central Sufi theme of the transformative power of love. As Rūmī pointed out, all types of love are ultimately aspects of our love for God; all kinds of love can lead to God. The constant heat of love's fire allows a soul to fully ripen. It allows an individual who is "raw" or immature to attain a "cooked" or even a "burnt" state. Most important, the power of love allows the individual to surrender the false self of the isolated ego for the sake of the Beloved and receive a deeper vision of reality—a vision that is no longer self-centered. In the words of Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī,

The first step in love  
is losing your head.

After the petty ego  
you then give up your life  
and bear the calamity.

With this behind you, proceed:  
Polish the ego's rust  
from the mirror  
of your self.

And as Khāqānī Shirwānī writes,

It is love that speaks to you,  
calling you beyond the limits  
of this created realm.

That which frees you  
from your tiny self  
also is love.

For the Sufis the highest form of knowledge is a kind of love, and the highest form of love is a type of direct knowing, or *gnōsis*. Yet the false self, with its petty egoism and socially conditioned responses, presents an overwhelming obstacle that isolates the soul from a genuine vision of Reality and the presence of the Beloved—whether the beloved is God or another human being. As Rūmī advises, “If you want to know your *self*, come out of yourself / Leave the tributary and flow toward the River.” Or as another classical writer puts it, “Know that when you learn to lose yourself, you will reach the Beloved. There is no other secret to be learnt, and more than this is not known to me.”

Put in psychological terms, it is the self-absorbed narcissism of the modern self that keeps us trapped in a tiny, lonely bubble of isolated awareness, unable to hear and participate in the larger choir of creation. While actively marketed as a healthy model of human existence, this isolation from others—and from the greater, living world in which we are embodied—constitutes a primary root of our modern spiritual, social, and ecological dilemmas.

As the Sufis clearly realized, love alone possesses the power to lead us beyond ourselves—and enables us to make the types of liberating personal sacrifices that might not otherwise be possible. For this reason, the spiritual opportunities present in love must never be overlooked if we wish to become the fully human individuals we are meant to be.



# LOVE'S ALCHEMY







## INVISIBLE CARAVANS

---

Love's concert is calling,  
but the flute can't be seen.

The drunks are in sight,  
but the wine can't be seen.

Hundreds  
of caravans  
have passed  
this very way—

Don't be surprised  
if their trace can't be seen.

*Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghribī*

## BLOOM LIKE A ROSE

Your heartrending fire  
made me bloom like a rose.

I died at your feet  
and returned fast to life.

My inborn freedom  
offered nothing in profit;  
but now I am free,  
since becoming your slave.

*Sanā't*

## THE SAME LANGUAGE

---

To speak the same language  
is kinship and affinity,  
yet a person stuck with those  
he can't confide in  
is trapped like a prisoner  
enchained by lack of understanding.

It is, indeed, ironic:  
There are many people  
from India and Turkey  
who speak the same language,  
while there are countless Turks  
who really can't understand one another.

The universal language is authentic insight.

To be one in heart is surely superior  
to only speaking the same words.

*Rūmī*

## DROWNED IN YOUR ESSENCE

---

All the world's atoms  
are really your mirrors,  
drowned in your essence  
like drops in the sea.

Like waves that roll over,  
crashing in emptiness,  
they deny themselves—  
they offer your proof.

*Wālah Dāghistānī*

## STONE HEARTS

---

Woe to that heart  
who cannot sense  
the beauty in music!

Never waste your time  
discussing love's ways  
with a stone heart.

Strangers to love  
are not invited  
to the Spiritual Concert.

Only those who burn  
will give off smoke.

*Sa'dī*

## FOUR ELEMENTS

---

Within your nature  
is every element,  
so listen to  
some sage advice:

You are demon  
and wild beast  
and angel  
and human —

Whatever you cultivate,  
that you will be.

*Bābā Afḍal Kāshānī*

## YOUR IRRESISTIBLE GLANCE

---

With your irresistible glance,  
you captured my heart and soul.

Having robbed me of those,  
take away my name and accomplishments too.

If any trace of me remains in this world,  
please, don't delay—take that too.

*‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī*



## STILL HANGING ON

As long as a speck of your existence still remains,  
the thought of idolatry still remains too.

You said, “I broke the idol of imagination,  
so now I am free” —

But that idol  
you supposedly demolished  
is still hanging on.

*Sa’dī*

## ATTACHMENT

Whoever's chained to the world  
suffers more.

Whoever's free of attachment,  
like a dervish,  
suffers less.

A donkey with a louder bell  
always attracts a heavier load.

*Abū Sa'īd Abī 'l-Khayr*

## BACK TO LIFE

Whoever you embrace  
will have everlasting life.

Those drawn to your thought  
will dwell in happy fields.

If you pass by one  
who fell on love's sword—  
your footsteps  
will bring him  
back to life.

*Khwājū Kirmānī*

## THE GLOW OF YOUR PRESENCE

---

Where have you taken your sweet song?  
Come back and play me a tune.

I never really cared for the things of this world.  
It was the glow of your presence  
that filled it with beauty.

*Ḥāfiẓ*

## EVERY DIRECTION

---

When traveling  
love's pathway,  
never stop  
turning your soul  
toward the eternal sun.

But since the Real  
shines forth  
from every direction,  
why aim your prayers  
at only one spot?

*Fayḍ Fayyādī*

## WITHOUT HINDRANCE

When the morning of friendship with God begins  
to dawn,  
the soul becomes distant from the entire world.

You then reach a place in which each breath of the  
soul,  
without the eye's hindrance,  
can see the Friend.

*Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī*

## LIFE AND DEATH

When the body dissolves  
don't think that it's death.

But ignorance, clearly,  
is the death of the soul.

With knowledge  
each breath  
will give your soul life.

In ignorance  
each breath  
chips your essence away.

*Muḥaqqiq Ardabīlī Bīdgulī*

## THE PATHWAY FINALLY OPENED

---

When my heart came to rule  
in the world of love,  
it was freed  
from both belief  
and from disbelief.

On this journey,  
I found the problem  
to be myself.

When I went beyond myself,  
the pathway finally opened.

*Mahsatī Ganja'ī*



## THE KING'S ROYAL FALCON

---

When I drew near  
to the candle of your face,  
I became plaintive and daring,  
just like the moth.

On the day I'm released  
from this miserable cage,  
like the king's royal falcon  
I'll fly free at last.

*Khawāja 'Abdallāh Anṣārī*

## ASLEEP

When I became water,  
I looked like a mirage.

When I became the sea,  
I looked like froth  
and foam.

When I became aware,  
the entire world  
seemed forgetful.

When I became awake,  
I saw I'd been asleep.

*Bīnawā Badakhshānī*

## THE SOUL'S FREEDOM

---

When a person of heart speaks, why say  
they're wrong?

If you lack eloquence,  
why quarrel with words, anyway?

Here's the real problem, as I see it—  
I can't worship this world or the next.

*Thank God for the soul's freedom.*

*Ḥāfīz*

## THE SUFI'S CAP

---

What's the use  
of those woolen robes  
and the Sufi's cloak?

Forget the attire  
and make yourself free  
of blameworthy deeds!

Wearing a woolen hat  
won't make you a Sufi.

Be humble like a dervish—  
then you can wear  
any cap that you please.

*Sa'dī*

## ESSENCE AND FORM

---

We've lost the essence  
and worship the husk.

But who wants the shell  
without tasting the nut?

Seduced by the form,  
we're not really alive—

Regaining the essence,  
we've become life itself.

*Sanā'i*

## YOUR HEART

Your heart is the mirror  
of the essence most high.

Of the king's royal mint  
your heart is the prize.

The heart's a vast ocean—  
but only holds  
a single pearl.

If I want such a treasure,  
your heart I am seeking.

*Shāh Ni'matallāh Walī*

## COMING CLEAN

---

We placed the prayer carpet  
on the wine jar  
and made ablutions  
with the tavern's dust.

Perhaps in these taverns  
we've rediscovered that life—  
the one we lost  
in the seminary.

*Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazālī*

## THE GREATEST NAME

---

We are the Treasure  
whose spell is the world.

We are that Essence  
molded into  
human form.

If you are seeking out  
the Greatest Name,  
don't pass us by—

Don't forget,  
we are that name.

*Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghribī*



## FINDING LIFE

True love is nothing but drinking the wine of  
eternity.

In this state, the soul finds life only by dying—  
but I wanted things in reverse!

I thought, “*First* I will know you, *then* I will die.”  
He replied, “Whoever knows me never dies.”

*Rūmī*

## HIDDEN TREASURE

---

Topple the ego to find yourself.

Why worry about the stars  
when you are your sky?

The world is full of obvious things,  
but you—  
you're a hidden treasure.

Remember with joy, you are your world.

*Sanā'ī*

## REALITY AND APPEARANCE

---

You who search  
the way of love:

In your mind,  
you seem to think  
you are praying to God—

But one who truly worships the Beloved  
never engages  
in self-worship.

There is a difference  
between real love  
and the love of appearances.

*Shāh Abū 'Alī Qalandar*

## HUNDREDS OF WAYS

Today, like every day,  
we are ruined and lonely.

Don't retreat,  
fleeing your emptiness  
through the doorway  
of thinking.

Try making some music instead.

There are hundreds of ways  
to kneel in prayer—  
hundreds of ways to open  
toward the heart  
of the Friend's beauty.

*Rūmī*

## PERPLEXED

Those who went the way  
of reason and logic—

And those who mimicked  
the conventions of learning,  
the dogmas of faith—

They never came to know  
the secrets of existence.

They became perplexed  
in the world  
and left perplexed too.

*Şafî 'Alî Shāh*

## FAR AWAY

Those who dwell  
in the Beloved's presence  
don't obsess on his thought  
and speak of him  
even less—

But those who huff and howl  
like the bellows of a bagpipe,  
call for him in a loud voice  
because they are far away.

*Bābā Aḡdal Kāshānī*

## A MIRAGE

The world is a veil  
on the face of our Friend.

The world is a bubble  
in the sea of his existence.

In the sight of those greedy for the Water of Being,  
the world is a mirage in the desert of seeking.

*Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghribī*

## THE WIND AT DAWN

---

The wind at dawn  
is the soul's confidant.

*Don't find yourself asleep.*

This is the time to share  
your greatest need.

*Don't find yourself asleep.*

From before-the-beginning to beyond-the-last,  
the two eternities are present now.

*Don't find yourself asleep.*

The door of the two worlds  
is open now.

*Don't find yourself asleep.*

*Rūmī*



## NOT WHAT WE THOUGHT

---

The way of union  
is not what we thought.

The world of soul  
is not what we imagined.

The Fountain of Eternal Life  
is closer than you think.

The Water of Life  
is in this very house—  
but still, we need to drink it.

*Ṣadr al-Dīn Qunawī*

## THE GIFT OF LIFE

The thought of you made me homeless—  
but loving you gave me eternal life.

Your grace and generosity made my body like a  
soul.

In this realm of endless toil, nothing could be finer  
than this.

*Sanā'ī*

## THE SCENT

Today I feel trapped,  
tightly bound  
in the cage of existence.

I need the scent  
of nonbeing  
to set me free.

Just for a moment,  
lend me the polish  
of grace:

Scour the rust of being  
from the mirror  
of my true Reality.

*Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī*

## ONE AND MANY

---

The Sun's shining essence  
is always just one;  
but its rays spread out  
and show it as "many."

Each created thing  
is like a colored lamp  
of the Sun—

The essence is one,  
but the attributes many.

*Ibn Muḥammad Hādī Ridā Qulī Hidāyat*

## REMEMBER THE TRUTH

---

The soul is love and affection—  
so know the soul.

But the Truth is ecstasy, forgetting your self.

When “I” and “you” are present,  
you’re thinking from  
the ego’s place.

If you hear those two words,  
then remember the Truth.

*Şaghīr Isfahānī*

## THIS SORROW

The sorrow  
of his love  
should become  
your habit.

Then you'll discover  
his love is sweet.

Act like a human being  
and embrace this sorrow—

In the end  
you will see  
this love  
is He.

*Majd al-Dīn Ṭāliba*

## EVERY FACE TURNS TOWARD YOU

---

You show your face  
in every particle.

You've become  
the shining sun  
from every direction.

Present in Ka'ba and present in monastery,  
every face  
turns toward your own—

You are the destination  
of believers  
and nonbelievers  
alike.

*Ṭabīb Shīrāzī*

## THEIR NUMBER IS FEW

---

The sea is full of pearls,  
but the number  
of pearl-divers  
is few.

The world is full of music,  
but the number  
of dancers  
is few.

Now I'm afraid  
that no prayer  
will be answered—  
since those  
who pray truly  
are really quite few.

*‘Imād al-Din Faqīh Kirmānī*



## TAVERN DWELLERS

The pure-hearted Sufis no longer care to exist—  
they're free of compulsion  
and no longer worship the self.

They offer their toasts in the Tavern of Ruin—

They're quaffing down wine,  
but never get drunk.

*Shāh Ni'matallāh Walī*

## KNOWLEDGE

---

The path of knowledge  
I traveled intensely.

In the circle of mystics  
I have been elevated.

But unveiling the heart  
I finally came to see—  
really—  
that I know nothing.

*Khwāja Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī*

## BIRDS OF HIS SKY

---

The men of His way  
breathe from another soul.

The birds of His sky  
fly from another nest.

Don't think  
you can see them  
using *this* sight—

They are beyond  
the two worlds  
and in another.

*Najm al-Dīn Dāya Rāzī*

## LOVE'S WITNESS

The holy warrior is out hunting for martyrdom;  
but the martyr of love, his station is higher.

How could these two ever be the same,  
come the Day of Judgment?

The first is killed by the enemy,  
but the second is slain by the Friend.

*Abū Sa'īd Abī 'l-Khayr*

## THE HIDDEN SUN

---

The heavenly spheres  
have lost their way  
in your amazement.

Bewildered and wondering,  
they forever turn  
before your door.

You are the hidden sun,  
shining in the soul's midst—

Yet who  
has seen  
such a hidden sun?

*‘Attār*

## THE HEART'S HOUSE

---

The heart's house that remains unlit  
by the divine Sun's majestic rays  
is narrow and dark  
like an orphan's cell  
far away  
from the feast  
of the Living King.

Such a heart lacks the Sun's radiance:

Its space does not expand

Its doors do not open

There is not even room to breathe.

A constrained grave is more comforting than  
this—

So come, arise from the tomb of your heart.

*Rūmī*

## A DESERT

The heart never races—  
except along love's path.

The soul never really begs to speak—  
except the words of love.

*Thank God—*

You ravaged my heart  
and made it a desert  
so no other love  
can flower there.

*Abū Sa'īd Abī 'l-Khayr*

## LOSING YOUR HEAD

---

The first step in love  
is losing your head.

After the petty ego,  
you then give up your life  
and bear the calamity.

With this behind you, proceed:  
Polish the ego's rust  
from the mirror  
of your self.

*Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī*



## THE BELOVED'S SCENT

---

If there is a sign of the Beloved in the idol-temple,  
circling the Ka'ba is quite unreasonable.

Without the Beloved's scent, the Ka'ba is just a  
house of idols;  
but with the Friend's perfume, an idol-temple is  
our Ka'ba.

*'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī*

## HIS LIVING PROOF

---

The eternal mysteries,  
following wisdom's lead,  
brought forth  
the human form  
as their living proof.

As long as the drop  
hadn't emerged from the sea,  
the ocean  
didn't notice  
the depths of its splendor.

*Mīrza 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdīl*

### THREE RULES

The divine path is nothing but courtesy;  
courtesy itself is compassionate action.

As long as you have a soul,  
it should be seeking.

Should the entire ocean  
be poured in your mouth,  
drink a little, but be content.

*Khawāja Bāqī Billāh*

## FIND IT IN YOU

The Divine Book's imprint  
is nothing but you.

The mirror of the King's Beauty  
is nothing but you.

Not a thing in this world  
is outside of you.

Whatever you're seeking—  
you'll find it in you.

*Bābā Afdal Kāshānī*

## LIFT THE VEIL

The day you lift that veil from your face,  
you'll hold the entire world hostage.

Reveal your beauty beyond these bounds?  
*My God*—you'll murder every living heart!

*Sanā'i*

## LEARNING TO BURN

---

The day love's fire was lit,  
the lover learnt  
the way of burning  
from the Beloved.

This burning and melting  
is the Friend's doing—

If the candle were never lit,  
the moth would never burn.

*Abū Sa'īd Abī 'l-Khayr*

## RUINED

The curve of your eyebrow  
is my only prayer niche.

Your ruby lips  
offer the clearest wine.

When the pious saw you,  
they prostrated in ecstasy;  
the wine-drinkers, too,  
became ruined and drunk.

*Murshidī Zawwār'ī*

## THAT WHICH FREES YOU

---

The bird that sings  
pain's song  
is love.

The messenger skilled  
in the language  
of the unseen world  
is love.

It is love that speaks to you,  
calling you beyond the limits  
of this created realm.

That which frees you  
from your tiny self  
also is love.

*Khāqānī Shirwānī*



## THE BELOVED'S DESIRE

---

The Beloved wants no lord, no master—  
She wants astonishment and devastation!

I'm like a monk, safe in my cloister—

She wants me to give up everything  
and roam the world like a dervish!

*ʿAṭṭār*

## WITHOUT YOU

---

Without you,  
I have no paradise  
and no heaven—

No celestial lake,  
no fountain of nectar,  
and no sea of life.

With your wrath,  
even heaven becomes hell—  
but with your grace,  
even hell flowers  
like springtime.

*Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamawī*

## SERVICE

Worship is nothing aside  
from serving others.

It is not dependent  
on prayer rugs, rosaries,  
or the Sufi's cloak.

*Sa'dī*

## THE MISSING SUN

You are like the sun—

*Come!*

Without your face, the garden is yellow and pale—

*Come!*

Without you, the world is like dust—

*Come!*

Without you, the circle of love turns cold.

*Come!*

*Rūmī*

## WE WERE TOGETHER

That idol made us idol-worshippers!

Worse, I think he knows  
*we can't exist without him.*

We were together  
sipping wine  
on that ancient  
Night of Union—

That left us drunk  
'til Resurrection's Day.

*Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī*

## BEYOND DISTINCTIONS

---

That fire  
whose name is love  
burns away  
both belief and disbelief.

Belief is one thing—  
the religion of love  
is something different.

Love's Prophet is beyond race,  
beyond creeds,  
beyond petty distinctions.

*Abū Sa'īd Abī 'l-Khayr*

## SEEKING YOUR TRACE

---

Thanks to you  
I'm seeking  
the soul of the world.

Bewildered, perplexed—  
I seek your presence  
in every place.

Now that you've made  
a home in my heart,

I'm seeking  
your trace  
in every space.

*Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī*

## ONLY ONE STEP

---

Taste the music  
in the lover's sigh.

Discover the cure  
in yearning's pain.

The distance  
to the Beloved  
is only one step—

Why not, then,  
take that step?

*Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Āmilī*



## CHECKMATE

You are the King  
and have checkmated  
every beautiful soul.

You are the Sun—  
the rest are your atoms.

You are the Light—  
every creation  
is your lamp.

You are the Essence—  
the entire world  
is your living sign.

*Ṭūṭī Hamadānī*

## BURN DOWN THE HOUSE

Take up life in a monastery—  
or take up love's fire  
and burn down the house.

A monk and a lover  
can't live in the same room.

Can't face the truth?

You could always  
just  
close your eyes.

*Sa'dī*

## TAKE A LOOK THERE

Spend some time with the People of Heart;  
in their presence, you'll find a heart too.

If you thirst for the beauty  
of the eternal Beloved,  
where might you look?

Since your heart is a mirror,  
take a look there.

*‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī*

## EVEN A WISE EYE

Your names reflect  
your boundless essence.

The world displays  
your living signs.

The stars trace out  
your very proof.

If not enraptured  
by your charms, well—  
even a wise eye  
is truly blind.

*Maftūn Hamadānī*

## WITHOUT NAME, WITHOUT TRACE

---

Sometimes you secretly  
come to the heart.

Sometimes you're seen  
before open eyes.

All of these names  
and these traces  
are yours—

Yet each time you come  
without name, without trace.

*Muḏaffar Kirmānī*

## THE VISION OF YOUR FACE

---

Your love, from before  
the beginning of time,  
is my soul—  
it's my very self.

Your love is the treasure  
of my weak, begging heart.

Perhaps your beauty  
has been far from me—  
but the vision  
of your face  
has stayed with me always.

*Sulṭān Walad*

## THE MIRROR AND ITS CASE

---

Each soul is created to serve as your mirror.

All things in the two worlds  
are only your mirrors.

The heart is the mirror of your most royal  
beauty—  
and both of these worlds  
are the case of that mirror.

*Najm al-Dīn Dāya Rāzī*

## IN MOSQUE AND CHURCH

---

In sanctuary and monastery,  
a hundred songs  
declare your praise.

You're the clearest light,  
but shine forth  
in every hue.

Each day and night, your name is called  
in Islam's mosque and Europe's church.

*Hātif Isfahānī*



## LOST OPPORTUNITY

Seeking life without the Friend's presence,  
you didn't spend a moment waiting at love's door.

My God! Sit down and mourn your loss!

That time is gone when you could have been living.

*Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī*

## YOUR LOVE

Religion is nothing  
except your love.

Awareness is nothing  
except your thought.

Should the world  
bring on  
a thousand  
pains,  
I've lost  
the knowledge  
of your love.

*Sayyid Ḥasan Ghaznawī*

## ACTION

Regardless of how much knowledge  
you might acquire,  
you are still ignorant  
without action—

You would be neither scholar nor learned,  
but an animal carrying books.

A donkey doesn't know  
whether it's carrying books  
or firewood.

*Sa'dī*

## TRADING IN LOVE'S CURRENCY

---

Reason said, "We live in a world  
of six directions—and that's it!"

Love replied, "There is a path beyond,  
and I have traveled it many times."

Reason saw a market and set up shop,  
but love trades in another currency altogether.

*Rūmī*

## THE BUBBLE

Pass away—  
then you'll find  
the eternal shore.

To reach the Friend,  
you have to go beyond yourself.

One day a bubble  
was wondering  
about its existence—

When it popped,  
it finally  
rejoined  
the sea.

*Fikrī Khurāsānī*

## THE MIRACLE OF YOUR FACE

---

Over hundreds of aeons,  
creation's fabric  
unfolded  
until the beauty  
of your face  
blazed forth  
in this world.

From the top of your head  
to the tip of your toe,  
*Subhānallāh*—  
All praise belongs to God!

Miraculously,  
he has molded you  
to my very desire.

*Khāqānī Shirwānī*

## TAKE A GOOD LOOK

---

One night  
during prayers  
a vision  
of the Beloved  
appeared to me.

Lifting the veil  
from his face,  
he said:

“Take a good look  
at the one  
you always leave behind.”

*Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī*

## THE SINGLE PEARL

Once we came to know the Beloved,  
we forgot the entire universe.

When we emerged from the broken shell,  
we fell in love with the Single Pearl.

*Maftūn Hamadānī*



## THE SUN AND THE SHADOW

---

Once upon a time  
the Beloved came and said:

I possess your love  
both day and night—  
but you'll never  
be my companion  
as long as you remain yourself.

I am the Sun,  
but you are just a shadow,  
walking upon the earth.

Step out of hiding  
and walk into my light—  
once you've been erased,  
then you will be  
my closest friend.

*‘Aṭṭār*

## WHAT WAS

Once I was here,  
but now “I” am not:

If there’s really a “me,”  
it could only be you.

If any robe warms  
and encompasses me now,  
that very robe—  
it could only be you.

In the way of your love,  
nothing was left—  
neither body nor soul.

If I have any body—  
If I have any soul—  
then, without question,  
it could only be you.

*‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī*

## THE SOUL'S DILEMMA

Once again, each day,  
I travel the path of your love.

Every night, without fail,  
I mourn your absence anew.

My soul lacks the courage  
to love one  
such as you —  
and my heart lacks the strength  
to abandon you too.

*‘Aṭṭār*

## THIS WAY

On the Friend's pathway  
I see neither body nor soul.

Everything but He  
is only a dreaming—  
or just mere belief.

Every created thing  
is far from this way—  
if this way, really,  
is what I am seeing.

*Saḥābī Astarābādī*

## KA‘BA OF THE HEART

---

On God’s pathway  
there are two Ka‘bas.

One is the Ka‘ba you can see;  
the other, the Ka‘ba of the heart.

As much as you can,  
make pilgrimage to the heart—

The heart’s value  
is greater  
than a thousand Ka‘bas.

*Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī*

## BETWEEN TWO BREATHS

Observe your life, between two breaths.

Breath is a wind, both coming and going.

On this wind you have built your life—  
but how will a castle rest on a cloud?

*Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)*

## PEOPLE OF THE PATH

---

People of the Path  
who know  
the secret of meaning  
are hidden from the eyes  
of the narrow-minded.

Ironically, though,  
everyone who comes to know  
the divine Reality  
possesses the purest faith—  
but is labeled an “unbeliever”  
by the pious.

*Rūmī*

## DON'T IMAGINE

O wayfarer—  
Don't imagine  
you're the only one  
traveling this path.

Since the Real is everywhere,  
don't imagine  
he's only in  
mosque and monastery.

Don't imagine  
that any evil  
served up  
from the hidden world  
is without a share of goodness.

In a word,  
if you profess Divine Unity,  
don't imagine  
any others than He.

*Ibn Muḥammad Hādī Riḍā Qulī Hidāyat*



## DON'T UTTER A SOUND

O nightingale—  
Learn love's way  
from the moth.

That burnt one  
passed away,  
but didn't  
utter a sound.

These pretenders  
are deluded  
in seeking him.

Those who came  
to know the Friend  
never sent back  
any news.

*Sa'dī*

## THE MOON OF YOUR LOVE

---

Not a single soul lacks  
a pathway to you.

There's no stone,  
no flower—  
not a single piece of straw—  
lacking your existence.

In every particle of the world,  
the moon of your love  
causes the heart  
of each atom to glow.

*Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghribī*

## YOUR GENEROSITY

Your generosity offers that which the ocean cannot.  
Your kindness is not postponed until tomorrow.

I never needed to ask you for anything.  
But who needs to ask the sun for its light?

*Rūmī*

## EVERY NAME THAT EXISTS

---

No atom exists  
that is apart  
from the sun.

Every raindrop is from  
the same ancient sea.

Has no one a name  
for this ultimate Truth?

Every name that exists  
is already owned  
by that Truth.

*Dārā Shikūh*

## SECONDHAND TALK

---

Never has my idol  
shown his face to anyone.

This gossip I'm hearing  
is just empty talk.

Even that one  
who's singing your praises  
has stolen those lines  
from somebody else.

*Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī*

## WHERE WOULD I GO?

Never could my heart  
be separate from you—  
nor could I worship  
anyone else.

If I forget your kindness,  
then whom could I love?

If I pass by your street,  
then where would I go?

*Najm al-Dīn Kubrā*

## BEHIND THE VEIL

---

Neither you nor I  
know the secrets of pre-eternity.

Neither you nor I  
have grasped the deepest mystery.

Now we are speaking  
beside the veil—

But once that curtain is lifted,  
neither you  
nor I  
will remain.

*Abū 'l-Ḥasan Kharaqānī*

## FREE

My head was full, overflowing with conceit—

I was staggering, drunk—  
wasted on the wine  
of my imagined greatness.

But your love made me low—  
it brought humility.

It freed me  
from having  
to worship  
myself.

*‘Abd al-Wāsi’ Jabalī*



## YOURS AND MINE

My dear, sanctimonious friends:

The Ka'ba will be yours,  
but the idol-temple  
will be mine.

The Heavenly Fountain  
will be yours,  
but the goblet will be mine.

You can have  
the finest rosaries;  
I'll take the Christian's  
lowly cincture.

You can take the  
entire world—  
but the Beloved  
will be mine.

*Shahna Khurāsānī*

## THE ARROW

---

Make your soul the target  
of love's arrow  
flying from the bow  
of the Beloved's hand.

Let it pass through your soul.

Don't bother  
to shield yourself  
from love's weapon—

Its pathway  
through the two worlds  
is hidden  
even from itself.

*‘Aṭṭār*

## WHO I REALLY AM

Make me reject  
all things besides you.

Leave me without companion,  
without comrade,  
and without friend.

First take away the awareness of myself;  
then let me see who I really am.

*Nashāt Isfahānī*

## CREATION MYTH

---

Made moist with love's dew,  
Adam's soil became clay.

A hundred conflicts and tumults  
then arose in the world.

The tip of love's sword  
glanced the vein  
of the spirit—

When one drop emerged,  
its name was *the heart*.

*Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī*

## WHAT'S THE USE?

When the heart is full of idolatry,  
what's the use  
of prostrating your head in prayer?

When poison has already overtaken the body,  
what's the use of gulping down medicine?

You'd like to display yourself in public  
as a model  
of perfect piety—

But what's the use of draping a clean robe  
over a dirty soul?

*Mahsatī Ganja'ī*

## HIDDEN PEARLS

---

Love may cut you deeply—  
but like an oyster's shell  
it contains  
hidden pearls.

Love's burden is great,  
but always be willing  
to carry this weight.

Like a heavy, laden branch,  
it will offer  
many fruits.

*Radī Ghaznawī*

## EVERY PLACE IS LOVE'S HOME

---

In the end, everyone reaps what they have sown.

Each person, whether sober or drunk, seeks the  
Beloved;  
every place is love's home, whether synagogue or  
mosque.

*Hāfiz*

## LIFE'S FLAME

Love is a source of many great troubles.

But lacking love  
is a disgrace  
for travelers upon this path.

Love is the life force of the entire universe—  
those who lack love  
are already dead.

*Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī*



## BURNT

Love burned up  
my very soul.

I learned burning  
and melting,  
just like the moth.

If my ashes  
someday  
should be scattered  
in hell—  
then hell, like me,  
would learn  
how to burn.

*Qīrī Baghdādī*

## LOOK

Look!

The heart is the truth's kernel;  
the body's the shell—

Look!

The face of the Friend  
adorns the robe of the soul—

Each atom displays a trace  
of His being—

Look!

Is the sunbeam His light—  
or is it He Himself?

*Shāh Ni'matallāh Walī*

## THE SECRET IS HIDDEN

---

Look at the world:  
the Divine Secret is hidden.

Like the Fountain of Life,  
it's hidden in darkness.

Millions of fish  
appeared in the sea—

Because of their number,  
the sea went into hiding.

*Abū Saʿīd Abī 'l-Khayr*

## LEADING EVEN FROM HERE

---

Last night in the wine house  
I met a drunken ascetic;  
he was wearing a rosary,  
with wine cup in hand.

“Why make your home here,  
in the Tavern?” I asked.

He answered back—

“There’s a pathway to God  
leading even from here.”

*Bahā’ al-Dīn ‘Āmilī*

## A PRAYER

Keep me  
from wanting  
this world  
or the next.

Crown me  
with honor—  
please empty  
my soul.

Make me  
your confidant  
on the pathway  
of seeking.

Keep me  
from taking  
any pathway  
but yours.

*‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī*

## ONE BREATH

---

It's only one breath  
from disbelief's world  
to the place  
where faith resides.

It's only one sigh  
from doubt's waystation  
to the homeland of certainty.

Don't now despise  
this single, dear breath—  
the purpose of life  
is just this breath.

*Shāh Ni'matallāh Walī*

## DUST ON YOUR DOORSTEP

---

In your service I'm emptied, emptied of myself.  
My soul is just the dust on your doorstep.  
But I don't offer my heart's gold to just anyone—  
The door to this treasure bears only your name.

*Hāfiz*

## CELEBRATE THIS LOSS

---

In the land of love  
there's no reason  
for comfort.

There, everything is loss—  
not increase.

But without pain and grief,  
how could the cure  
ever arrive?

Without error,  
how hope  
for forgiveness?

*Abū Sa'īd Abī 'l-Khayr*



## ONE AND THE SAME

---

In the circle of existence  
everything, really,  
is one and the same.

Being and nonbeing:  
one and the same.

Don't think that  
lover and beloved  
are truly separate:

Witness and witnessed  
are one and the same.

*Ghayrat Nāyīnī*

## SEEING

In suffering and pain, I always see the cure.  
In wrath and injustice, I see grace and loyalty.

On this earth,  
under the roof of the starry sky,  
in everything I see,  
there I see you.

*Sulṭān Walad*

## YOUR GLANCE

The heart's in love  
with your beautiful,  
drunken glance.

You are the candle—  
the entire world is your fluttering moth.

Our souls, our hearts—  
you made them crazy with love.

You quickly became the home of our hearts—  
and our hearts, now, are also your home.

*Qāsim Anwār*

## ANOTHER KIND OF RECKONING

---

In love's tavern, there's another kind of wine.

But for those who adore religion,  
they're playing a different game.

Your drunks are free  
from the Day of Judgment;  
they face  
another kind of reckoning  
altogether.

*Shams al-Dīn Kirmānī*

## DON'T FLEE

In love's slaughterhouse  
only the pure  
are ever at risk.

The arrogant and devious  
are never prized or desired.

If your heart is pure,  
then never flee  
the butcher's knife.

Whoever won't be killed  
is already dead meat.

*Sarmad*

## SEEKING YOU TOO

---

In love's meeting place,  
on the very first day,  
a person of heart  
spoke with true promise:

*O Seeker!*  
*Don't seek out anyone*  
*who's looking*  
*for someone*  
*who's other than you —*

*Seek out that one*  
*who is seeking you too.*

*Ṭālib Jājaramī*

## SOMETHING DIFFERENT

In love's circle there's another kind of serenity;  
in love's wine, another kind of hangover.  
What you learned in school is one thing—  
love is something entirely different.

*Rūmī*

## A THOUSAND EYES

In love,  
your lips should be silent.

Inside the heart,  
you cook, boil, and burn.

No longer should you have  
a single eye—  
but you  
become  
a thousand eyes.

No longer should you have  
a single ear—  
but you  
become  
a thousand ears.

*Mushtāq Isfahānī*



## FROM YOU

---

In everything, there's a different gift of your beauty.  
In every page of your goodness,  
there's a different ecstasy  
to be found.

Every defect receives another kind of your perfection.  
Every lover finds a different type of union with you.

*‘Attār*

## AS YOU PLEASE

In both fortune  
and misfortune  
there is always  
decline.

Don't complain  
if he has put dregs  
in your clear wine.

Since the world  
is always shifting  
and never stays  
in the same place,  
have a joyful heart  
and pass the time  
as you please.

*Shams Shīrāzī*

## WHERE'S THE WATER?

In a vision I asked  
the Master of Wisdom:

“Can you explain to me  
the Names, Attributes,  
and Essence  
of the Lord of lords?”

He replied:

“You’re just like a fish  
asking the waves and the bubbles,  
*Can you show me the way to the water?*”

*Maftūn Hamadānī*

## ACHIEVE THE STATE

If you're serious  
about joining  
the people of vision  
you must move from speech  
to the inner state.

You won't become one  
just by chanting "Unity" —

Repeating the word *sugar*  
won't make your mouth sweet.

*Dārā Shikūh*

## A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

---

If you're feeling holier than thou,  
don't look down  
on our lowly station  
from your exalted place.

Our existence  
has gone the way  
of nonexistence.

We are drunk on affection,  
but you are drunk on pride.

There's a world of difference  
between your intoxication  
and ours.

*Fayḍī Turbatī*

## SEEING WITH INTIMACY

---

If you dwell with the Friend  
in genuine intimacy,  
then, in the whole world,  
you will see  
the incomparable God.

Since the whole world  
is the living mirror of God,  
it is impossible to see anything  
aside from God.

*Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamawī*

## BURNT HEARTS

---

If you haven't  
been touched  
by love's burning flame,  
how could our hearts  
ever really be close?

But if your heart *isn't* burnt,  
maybe it's best  
to just stay away—

We set fire  
to every heart  
that hasn't been cooked.

*Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī*

## DROWN IN LOVE

If you drown in love, you will taste eternity;  
in reason alone, you forsake true life.

Taste the strangeness of this wine!  
Love's intoxication is the path to sobriety.

*‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī*



## EVERY ATOM

If the veil would fall from the Beloved's face,  
every atom would dance  
like it's stark raving mad.

Every universe is drunk from love's cup—  
but the cup is still full,  
right to the brim.

*ʿAndalīb Kāshānī*

## WHAT POSSIBLE USE?

If the heart rides on love's steed,  
all its desires will be answered.

But if there were no heart  
on which love could settle—

and if there were no love to begin with—

what possible use  
could the heart  
ever have?

*Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamawī*

## THE MIRROR AND THE SUN

---

If the heart doesn't travel  
the way of your union,  
what should the heart do?

If the soul doesn't long  
to be one with the Friend,  
what should the soul do?

When the sun's shining glory  
blazes forth in the mirror—

If the mirror doesn't say,  
“*Now look, I'm the sun,*”  
tell me, then—  
what should the mirror do?

*Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazālī*

## FACES

If someone's always been steeped  
in the presence of God,  
for such a soul  
the king is like a beggar,  
and the beggar is like a king.

In the faces of people,  
such a saint  
sees God's light.

Yes—*Human beings  
are the face of God.*

*Kāhī Kābulī*

## TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

---

If He is in sight wherever you look,  
why cast a blind eye  
when it comes to yourself?

The Real said to you  
*I'm wherever you turn—*

So why don't you take  
a closer look at yourself?

*Dārā Shikūh*

## WINE WORSHIPER

---

I always want wine, but never get drunk;  
There's nothing I long for, aside from that cup.

*But what does it mean to worship this wine?*

It means  
I can't worship  
the ego  
like you.

*Kamāl al-Dīn Ismaʿīl*

## BEYOND RITE AND RITUAL

---

I will pass beyond belief and religion  
because your love is higher.

How long can I keep this love a secret?  
My only love is you, beyond rite and ritual.

*‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī*

## THE WORLD-VIEWING CUP

---

I searched each land  
for the world-viewing cup.

I couldn't rest  
either day or night.

But when my teacher  
finally helped me to see,  
I discovered  
at last  
I am that cup.

*Zayn al-Dīn Nasawī*



## HIDDEN AWAY

I haven't seen your rose garden  
in a very long time—

Nor your half-drunk  
languishing  
narcissus eyes.

You've hidden yourself away  
from humanity  
like truth—

We haven't seen your face  
in a very long time.

*Rūmī*

## WHOLLY UNIQUE

---

I asked, "Who are you like  
in your overwhelming beauty?"

He replied, "Only myself,  
as I am quite unique."

*I am love, lover,  
and the Beloved.*

*I am Beauty, I'm the mirror,  
and the longing eye.*

*Abū Sa'īd Abī 'l-Khayr*

## KEEP ME FREE

I am God's drunk—  
*forget the wine and the cup.*

I'm the hunter's prey—  
*so let's sell the farm.*

Ka'ba and idol-temple  
exist only for You—

If not, keep me free  
from any such place.

*Khawāja 'Abdallāh Anṣārī*

## YOUR ANCIENT FRIEND

---

Hidden secrets  
are the jewels  
of your treasury.

Hidden or seen—  
everything springs  
from your chest.

Both worlds  
were created  
only for you.

Heaven's sphere  
is your ancient friend.

*Maftūn Hamadānī*

## EMPTINESS

For someone whose trade is emptiness  
and whose work is annihilation,  
the search for certainty, knowledge,  
and religion  
has come to an end.

Since he's annihilated,  
only God remains—  
just God.

This is the meaning of  
“when poverty becomes complete,  
you find God.”

*Abū Saʿīd Abī 'l-Khayr*

## TOUCHED BY YOUR GRACE

---

Every soul rejoices  
if touched by your grace.

Tasting your favor  
is eternal good fortune.

When your grace touched an atom  
for only a moment,  
that atom blazed brighter  
than a thousand suns.

*Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī*

## IT WOULD BE ME

Drunk on love's wine?

*That would be me.*

Broke a thousand vows?

*That would be me.*

Crazy yet learned—

Scoundrel yet saint—

If anyone is like that

*it would be me.*

*Pūr Bahā Jāmī*

## SILENCE

Drink the wine of mystic knowledge,  
but don't then forget to keep your lips closed.

It's never a good time  
to sell the Divine Secret!

Should you face any troubles,  
don't babble and gush  
like the mountain spring.

If you remain silent,  
you'll then become the sea.

*‘Aṭṭār*



## JUST STOP

Don't regret the past;  
release your worries  
about the future.

Don't think about yourself—  
and stop trying not to!

Now's the time  
to leave the shore—  
the Ocean of Unity  
is calling...

don't listen...  
don't see...

don't say...  
don't think...

don't be...

JUST STOP.

*Bābā Afḍal Kāshānī*

## NEVER LOSE THE WAY

---

Don't lose the trail  
of wisdom's scent.

While on this hunt,  
don't go astray,  
worrying if every little thing  
is good or bad.

You are the traveler,  
you are the path,  
and you are the destination.

Be careful  
never  
to lose  
the way to yourself.

*Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī*

## BLIND AS A BAT

Divine Oneness  
is like being in sunshine.

So why be afraid  
of the bat-natured ones?

If they're the cause of your worry,  
come out of hiding—

There's no need to run  
from those who can't see.

*Saḥābī Astarābādī*

## LOST IN CELEBRATION

Do not join us without a tambourine—  
we are lost in celebration.

Stand up and beat the drum—  
we are now victorious in love!

We are drunk without a drop of wine.  
We are beyond anything you have ever imagined.

*Rūmī*

## PATHWAYS

Don't be foolish and think the heart is just inside  
the breast—  
or that you will reach the destination with only  
two steps.

Knowledge, piety, asceticism, desire, and seeking—  
these are all pathways, but never the final goal.

*Bābā Afdal Kāshānī*

## NOURISH THE SOUL

---

Desire the loaf  
which nourishes the soul.

Seek the knowledge  
which can never  
be written  
in words.

Desire the secret  
hidden in the hearts  
of God's friends,  
even beyond the grasp  
of angels.

*Rūmī*

## WHAT I ASK

---

Dear God—  
I'm only a beggar.

Yet what I ask  
is more  
than a thousand kings  
can ask.

Everyone asks  
for something  
from your royal threshold—  
but I have come  
to ask  
only *for you*.

*Sayyid Ḥasan Ghaznawī*

## THIS SIDESHOW

---

Dear Beloved—

How long  
will this separation  
go on?

Since I am you,  
how long  
is this “being you”  
and “being me”  
going to last?

With your jealous nature,  
nobody else  
even has a chance—  
but how long  
must I endure this sideshow  
with everyone else?

*‘Azīz Kāshānī*



## YOUR DISHEVELED CURLS

---

Dangle a tress from your disheveled curls  
and you'll evict the monks from their monasteries.

Shine a reflection of your face in this world  
and even the idols will kneel down in prostration.

*Rūzbihān Baqlī*

## SIT BY ME

Come and touch  
the Sufi's heart.

If you're like salt,  
come lie upon my wounds.

Through your absence,  
my heart became a rose garden.

Just for a moment,  
sit by the one you've slain.

*Khalīl Ṭālaqānī*

## WITHOUT YOUR PRESENCE

---

Carrying your thought, why would I think of wine?  
Keep the wine-vat sealed—the tavern's now in ruins.  
Even heaven's wine, just throw it out.

Without your presence,  
even the sweetest drink  
is nothing but torture.

*Ḥāfiz*

## BEGGING FOR A GLIMPSE

---

Both worlds are aglow  
from the light of the Friend.

You hide in the world  
like the soul in a body.

With yearning we wait,  
begging  
for a glimpse  
of your beautiful Oneness—

Please drop all those veils  
from the sun of your face.

*Shāh Abū 'Alī Qalandar*

## ARGUMENTS OF THE WISE

---

Books and reading  
don't make up  
the Beloved's path.

Reason doesn't lead  
to the Plain of Truth.

In the Land of Knowledge,  
the arguments of the wise  
are like well-worn pathways—  
muddy trails  
left behind  
by wild beasts.

*Ḥusayn Mu'min Yazdī*

## SINCE THAT DAY

Before diffusing the light  
of the Pleiades . . .

Before stretching  
the zodiac's band  
across the very heavens . . .

From before  
the beginning  
of time . . .

Since that day,  
like a flame upon a candle,  
your love's  
been bound to us  
with a thousand chains.

*Najm al-Dīn Dāya Rāzī*

## SWEEP OUT THE STABLE

Be watchful—the grace of God appears suddenly.  
It comes without warning to an open heart.

Sweep out the stable of your existence  
and the king will gladly enter.

*Rūmī*

## CREATION'S WITNESS

---

At time's beginning  
that beauty  
which polished creation's mirror  
caressed every atom  
with a hundred thousand suns.

But this glory  
was never witnessed.

When the human eye emerged,  
only then was He known.

*Mīrzā 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdil*



## SWEPT AWAY

At first, the way of your love  
seemed easy.

I thought I'd reach  
your union  
with speed.

After taking a few steps,  
I found  
the way  
is an ocean.

When I stepped in,  
a wave swept me away.

*Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī*

## IDOL WORSHIP

---

Since nonexistence  
holds the place of honor,  
stop all the focus  
on yourself.

Existence is your idol,  
so decrease your idol-worship.

When you become free  
from both being  
and nonbeing,  
then drink the wine of joy—  
but reduce  
your drunkenness  
on the world.

*Aḥmad Jāmī*

## THE RUST OF STRANGERS

---

Any heart who resides  
in the Beloved's alley  
becomes a confidant  
of the Court of Secrets.

File away  
the rust of strangers  
from the heart's mirror;  
then it will deserve  
the splendor  
of the Friend's face.

*Gulzār Isfahānī*

## NEARNESS

Although we're near,  
you'd never know it.

Thinking of yourself,  
our distance  
is all  
your doing.

Want to reach me?  
Then lose yourself.

Walking love's path,  
you're either you  
or me.

*Sanā'ī*

## KERNEL AND THE SHELL

---

Although both worlds are only His being,  
how did the human become the kernel?  
How did the world become the shell?

Is it because  
the human  
is the pupil of his eye?

Or is it because  
the human is the mirror  
of the Friend's face?

*Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghribī*

## ONE BODY

---

All human beings  
are the members  
of one body—  
every person is a glint,  
shining from a single gem.

When the world causes pain for one member,  
how could the other members  
ever rest in peace?

If you lack grief  
for another one's sorrow,  
why call yourself  
a human being?

*Sa'dī*

## LOVE'S ALCHEMY

---

Abandon the copper of existence  
like one who walks the Path—

When you find love's alchemy,  
then all will turn to gold.

Sleeping and eating  
have drawn you far  
from dignity—  
when you awake,  
you'll recall your true self.

*Hāfiz*

## TURN WITH THE STARS

---

If you are seeking your *self*,  
come out of yourself.

Leave the tributary  
and flow toward the River.

Why carry the burden  
of heaven's millstone  
when you could turn instead  
with the choir  
of the circling stars?

*Rūmī*



## DAZED

A person made dazed  
by the cup of love  
forgets all other joys.

He speaks with remembrance  
in his innermost soul—  
and then falls silent  
to outer disputes.

*‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī*

## CLEAR WINE

A mystic is one  
who passes away—

He abides in the essence  
of that which is Real.

Such a person is pure,  
clear wine without dregs.

Now whole, he displays  
the Most Beautiful Names.

*Bīnawā Badakhshānī*

## SOMETHING ELSE

In love's battlefield,  
there's another kind of combat.  
There's another kind of victory,  
another kind of escape.

All those things you hear—  
people crying out,  
lamentations,  
weeping,  
moaning,  
and sighing—  
are only the sounds  
of raw desire.

Love itself  
is something else.

*Wālah Dāghistānī*

## BE LIKE THE OCEAN

---

A falling stone doesn't trouble the ocean.  
A mystic who's offended  
is still a shallow puddle.

If you are slighted, then bear it with patience.  
Through forgiveness, your soul will be pure.

At some point  
you'll be nothing but dust;  
in humility, become dust today.

*Sa'dī*

## THE CIRCLE

You are the pain  
and the cure  
of the suffering heart.

You are the lover, love,  
and Beloved.

You are the center,  
the circle,  
the compass that unites.

You are standing apart  
from any veil.

*Ḥazīn Lāhijī*

## Translating Persian Poetry

Most popular translations of Rūmī into English have been made without careful reference to the Persian text of the originals, and many are actually adaptations of literal, dry-sounding English-language translations made decades ago by scholars. While these adaptations or “English-to-English translations” are often beautiful, distortions arise, and meanings present in the original poems often become lost in the process.

The word *translation* means “to carry across” and is never just a mechanical undertaking, but an art, especially in the case of poetry. Regardless of a translator’s approach, it is simply not possible to produce a literal translation of a poem from Persian—or from any other language—and have it automatically “work” in English.

All our translations are made directly from the Persian text, and we follow three basic rules that we hope allow the original works to be carried over gracefully into modern English:

1. The translation must work in English as a poem (or as an epigram, in the case of quatrains).
2. Rephrasing a line is permitted, if doing so helps to transmit the meaning more clearly.
3. Otherwise, each translation is kept as literal as possible.

Following this method allows us to remain faithful to the ideas and meanings of the original poems, while granting enough freedom to produce good translations.

To illustrate how this method shapes our work, compare our version of a famous Rūmī quatrain to a strictly literal translation:

Literal translation:

Today, like every day, we are ruined—ruined.  
Don't open the door of thinking; pick up a lute.  
There are a hundred kinds of prayer (*nāmāz*),  
    bowing (*rukū'*), and prostration (*sujūd*)  
for the one whose prayer niche (*miḥrāb*) is the  
    beauty of the Friend.

Our translation:

Today, like every day,  
we are ruined and lonely.

Don't retreat,  
fleeing your emptiness  
through the doorway  
of thinking.

Try making some music instead.

There are hundreds of ways  
to kneel in prayer—  
hundreds of ways to open  
toward the heart  
of the Friend's beauty.

While the literal translation would work well in an academic study, as Robert Frost once noted, it's the poetry that gets lost in the translation. Because of the numerous technical references in the last two lines, such a literal version does not really work as a poem for English-speaking readers; it also lacks a lyrical sense of rhythm that knits the work together into a whole.

Our translation maintains the sense of the original poem but also works in English. It maintains Rūmī's reference to the practice of prayer, and alludes to the opening



of the heart-shaped prayer-niche (*miḥrāb*) in Rūmī's original. While preserving this fidelity, the translation also works for the general reader who is not versed in the intricacies of the Islamic ritual prayer. Finally, in poems like this with meanings or technical terms that cannot be gracefully carried over into English, we provide notes for readers who'd like to go deeper into the Persian text.

### MUSIC, STRUCTURE, AND VERSE

*Rubāʿī* literally means a poem of four lines—a quatrain. In the original Persian, each four-line poem possesses a rhythm and a rhyme scheme. Like the poetry of other cultures, Persian poetry has a musical dimension in its very structure. Mystical and spiritual poetry was often sung or recited with musical accompaniment at Sufi gatherings. To highlight this dimension, a *rubāʿī* is sometimes called a *tarāna*, a “song” or “melody.” Even without musical accompaniment—or an English-language translation—hearing a poem recited in Persian is a sonorous, magical experience.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to reproduce the rhythms and musical qualities of Persian poetry in English translation. But working together, we have arranged some translations to be recited with musical accompaniment, in conjunction with the original versions in Persian. In the case of quatrains, Sabrineh recites the poems in Persian with a light musical accompaniment offered by David on the Persian *setar*, an instrument long associated with Sufi

mystical poetry. After the presentation in Persian, David offers the work in English. This way of presenting the poems works well, allowing listeners to get a taste of the Persian originals in addition to the translations in English. As a collaboration between a native speaker of Persian and a native speaker of English, these performances, like our translations, build a bridge between cultures, while the poems highlight deeper and timeless aspects of human spirituality.

In our work of translation, we pay a great deal of attention to finding just the right phrasing for the lines in English. An effective poem often possesses the quality of an *incantation*, something literally “suffused with song.” This is the very quality missing in literal translations that makes them precise but “flat.” Even if not performed or recited, our translations are meant—at the very least—to be heard within the mind’s ear, and not simply read. In this way, owing to careful attention to their phrasing, the translations possess an internal rhythm, momentum, and structure—even in the case of the short, four-line *rubāʿīyāt*.

Recordings of original Persian poems with translation can be accessed on our website at [www.sufipoetry.com](http://www.sufipoetry.com).

## Stringing Pearls: The Forms of Persian Poetry

All classical Persian poetry is carefully structured in terms of rhyme, meter, and form. This appendix explains the basic structure and rhyme scheme of the three poetic forms most used by classical Sufi poets: the *rubāʿī* (quatrain), the *ghazal* (ode), and the *mathnawī* (couplet).

In the original Persian, the rhythmic, songlike quality of the *rubāʿī* and *ghazal* forms has an intoxicating effect, which inspired the use of this poetry at Sufi gatherings.

### THE RUBĀʿĪ, OR QUATRAIN

A *rubāʿī* is a four-line poem that follows the rhyme scheme *a-a-b-a*. (In some cases, though, all lines rhyme.) Because they are so short, quatrains tend to be aphoristic, even epigrammatic. In some quatrains the first two lines make a

statement, the third line provides an antithesis, and the fourth line provides a synthesis, resolution, or summary of the entire poem. Along with their rhythm and rhyme, Persian quatrains almost always embody a “rhythm of ideas,” which contributes to their aphoristic and musical nature.

The *rubāʿī* form arose in the Persian province of Khorasan, which was also the birthplace of Persian Sufism. According to tradition, the great Sufi master Abū Saʿīd Abī ʿl-Khayr (967–1049) was the first person to introduce the use of poetry—and specifically the quatrain—into Sufi practice. Quatrains were used as a way to summarize complex ideas in a nutshell, both in talks and in writings. In addition to summarizing teachings, quatrains were used to express devotional sentiments and to provide what one writer calls “a haiku-like encapsulation of a mystical state.”

Each line of a quatrain is between ten and thirteen syllables long, and, like all Persian poetry, makes use of specific meters. (See form 1, pages 184–85.)

## THE GHAZAL, OR ODE

The word *ghazal* means “words exchanged between lovers.” *Ghazals* were originally love poems (or love songs) and maintained that emphasis after being adopted by the Sufis.

An ideal length for a *ghazal* is sometimes considered to be around seven lines; these poems can be considerably longer, though usually not more than fifteen lines. Like quatrains, *ghazals* use a monorhyme: each complete verse in the poem ends with the same sound or patterns of

sound, and the first two half-verses rhyme as well. (See sample 2, pages 186–87.) The first major Sufi poet to leave us a collection of *ghazals* is Sanā'ī (d. 1131), one of the first great Sufi poets.

Persian poets referred to their craft as “stringing pearls”; that is, each complete poem is a necklace composed of individual pearls, or verses. An interesting feature of the *ghazal* is that each “pearl” or verse stands as an independently complete poetic thought. If the first and final lines of the poem are left in place, it is often possible to rearrange the position of the other “pearls” in the poem, without affecting its overall meaning.

Another feature of the *ghazal* is the common mention of the poet's pen name (*takhallus*) in the final line or lines. Rather than being a signature in the modern sense, the pen name is used as a formal way to close the poem.

Rūmī was a prolific composer of *ghazals*. He never used his own name but often invoked that of “Shams of Tabriz”—his spiritual mentor—in closing his poems. Rūmī's collection of *ghazals*, the *Dīwān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī* (The Collected Poems of Shams of Tabriz), is staggering in its scope; it contains over 3,200 *ghazals* and close to 1,700 quatrains.

## THE MATHNAWĪ, OR RHYMED COUPLET

In the *mathnawī* form (pronounced *masnavī* in Persian), each half-verse making up a complete verse rhymes. (See sample 3, pages 188–89.) Unlike the *rubā'ī* and *ghazal* forms

(which use a monorhyme throughout the entire poem), the rhyme is allowed to change with each line. This made it possible for poets to use the *mathnawī* form for writing very lengthy works and specifically encouraged Sufi poets to use the *mathnawī* form for longer “teaching works.”

The first Sufi poet to use the *mathnawī* form was Sanā’ī, in his wide-ranging work, *The Garden of Truth*. This was followed by ‘Aṭṭār’s epic work, *The Conference of the Birds*. Rūmī’s students encouraged him to compose a similar teaching work, like those of Sanā’ī and ‘Aṭṭār. The result is considered one of the hallmark works of Persian Sufism, commonly known simply as the *Mathnawī*, spanning six books and about twenty-five thousand verses.

Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* begins with the famous “Song of the Reed Flute”; below we have reproduced the first few lines of that prologue to illustrate the rhyme scheme of the *mathnawī* form.

Many other types of Persian poetry exist, including the *qaṣīda* (eulogy) and the *qiṭ‘a* (fragment). Yet nearly all Sufi poetry follows the three primary forms outlined in this appendix.

## SAMPLES OF THE THREE FORMS

The following pages contain a sample of each of the three forms. The Persian version appears on each left-hand page, while the English translation appears on the right. In each sample we have highlighted the rhyme patterns of the Persian text in bold. Audio files of these samples, read in Persian, can be accessed on our website at [www.sufipoetry.com](http://www.sufipoetry.com).

- 1 bingar bi-jahān sirr-i ilāhī **pinhān**
- 2 chun āb-i ḥayāt dar siyāhī **pinhān**
- 3 paydā āmad zi baḥr māhī anbūh
- 4 shud baḥr zi anbūhī-yi māhī **pinhān**

**FORM I** RUBĀ'Ī, OR QUATRAIN:

*The Secret Is Hidden by Abū Sa'īd Abī 'l-Khayr*

A *rubā'ī* is a four-line poem following a specific meter, in which lines one, two, and four follow the same rhyme pattern. In the example above, not only does the final word (*pinhān*, “hidden”) rhyme, but so too does the last part of the previous word (*-āhī*).

- 1 Look at the world:  
the Divine Secret is hidden.
- 2 Like the Fountain of Life,  
it's hidden in darkness.
- 3 Millions of fish  
appeared in the sea—
- 4 Because of their number,  
the sea went into hiding.



- 1 dar miyān-i pardah-i khūn 'ishq rā gulzār**hā**  
'āshiqān rā bā jamāl-i 'ishq-i bī chūn kār**hā**
- 2 'aql gūyad shish jihat ḥaddast u bīrūn rāh nīst  
'ishq gūyad rāh hast u raftah'am man bār**hā**
- 3 'aql bāzārī bidīd u tājirī āghāz kard  
'ishq dīdah zān sūy bāzār-i ū bāzār**hā**
- 4 ay basā manṣūr-i pinhān zi'timād-i jān-i 'ishq  
tark-i minbarhā biguftah bar shudah bar dār**hā**
- 5 'āshiqān-i durd kish rā dar darūna dhawqhā  
'āqilān-i tīrah dil rā dar darūn inkār**hā**
- 6 'aql gūyad pā manih kandar fanā juz khār nīst  
'ishq gūyad 'aql rā kandar tu ast ān khār**hā**
- 7 hīn khamush kun khār-i hastī rā zi pā-yi dil bikan  
tā bibīnī dar darūn-i khwīshstan gulzār**hā**
- 8 Shams-i Tabrīzī tu'ī khūrshīd andar abr-i ḥarf  
chūn bar āmad āftābat maḥw shud guftār**hā**

**FORM 2** GHAZAL, OR ODE:

*Rose Gardens of the Heart by Rūmī*

Each complete verse of a *ghazal* follows the same rhyme pattern, as does each half-verse of the first line.

- 1 The rose gardens of love are hidden in the heart;  
lovers are always doing business with Incomparable  
Beauty.
- 2 Reason said, "We live in a world of six directions—  
and that's it."  
Love replied, "There is a path beyond, and I have  
traveled it many times."
- 3 Reason saw a market and set up shop,  
but love trades in another currency altogether.
- 4 Oh! Trusting in love's essence, many hidden souls  
have left reason's pulpit and faced the gallows like  
Ḥallāj!
- 5 Lovers who drink the dregs are full of knowledge and  
joy;  
but intellectuals, dark in heart, are full of denial.
- 6 Reason said, "The pathway of selflessness is nothing  
but thorns."  
Love replied, "Those thorns are inside yourself."
- 7 But now, be silent—  
Clear away those thorns from the depths of your  
heart.  
Then you'll see the rose gardens within.
- 8 Shams of Tabrīz, you are the sun melting away the  
fog of empty talk.  
Since your sun rose, all that has vanished.

- 1 bishnū az nay chūn ḥikāyat **mīkunad**  
az judā'ihā shikāyat **mīkunad**
- 2 kaz nayistān tā marā bubrīdah' **and**  
dar nafīram mard u zan nālīdah' **and**
- 3 sīnah khwāham sharḥah sharḥah az firāq  
tā bigūyam sharḥ-i dard-i ishtiyāq
- 4 har kasī kū dūr mānd az aṣl-i **khwīsh**  
bāz jūyad rūzgār-i waṣl-i **khwīsh**

**FORM 3** MATHNAWĪ, OR RHYMED COUPLET:

*Song of the Reed Flute by Rūmī*

In the *mathnawī* form, each half-verse rhymes, and the rhyme changes with each new verse.

- 1 *Listen to the reed flute,*  
*its song of separation:*
- 2 Ever since I was cut from the reed-bed,  
men and women have moaned from my sound.
- 3 I need a heart torn by separation,  
so you may understand the pain of love's desire.
- 4 Whoever's been taken from his home  
always wishes to return.



## Glossary

**Annihilation** (*fanā'*). "Passing away" or loss of the normal sense of the self, which enables the mystic to experience the presence of God. Usually paired with *baqā'* ("permanence" or "abiding"). By passing away from the ego, the mystic discovers the true self that abides.

**Attributes** (*ṣifāt*). The multiple qualities of God that are expressed in creation and are related to the names (*asmā'*) of God. For example, the attribute of mercy is reflected in the name "the Merciful." While the names and attributes may be described, the essence (*dhāt*) of God is beyond description. *See also* Essence and Most Beautiful Names.

**Beloved**. Also "the Friend." A common Sufi name for God as the object of love and spiritual desire. Can also

be used to denote a human being who mirrors divine attributes.

**Completed Human** (*al-insān al-kāmil*). An individual who comes to reflect all levels of existence and all the divine names. Often translated “Perfect Man,” the idea first appears in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī. The completed human being lies latent within each person but needs to be realized.

**Day of Alast.** In pre-eternity, when souls were created, God asked, *Alastu bi-rabbikum*, “Am I not your Lord?” They replied, “Yes, we affirm that!” (Qur’ān 7:171). In Sufi interpretation, this exchange established the essential covenant between God and those souls. During this banquet, before the creation of the world, those souls drank the wine of pre-eternity with God. The ability to remember this event returns a soul to its primordial state of surrender to the divine.

**Dervish** (*darwīsh*). Literally, “one who waits at the threshold.” A follower of the Sufi path; one who strives for spiritual poverty or emptiness.

**Ego** (*nafs*). The lower, impulsive self that needs to be purified. Used in this sense, *nafs* refers to the *nafs al-ammārah*, “the compulsive self” or “the commanding self.” In some schools of Sufi thought, there is a ladder of “selves” or more refined levels of awareness, such as

“the inspired self,” “the contented self,” and others. One goal of Sufi training is to purify the ego and gain access to these more refined states of awareness.

**Essence** (*dhāt*). The most essential, innermost, and unified dimension of something, which is beyond description. In the case of God, essence is contrasted with attributes (*ṣifāt*) and names.

**Friend.** *See* Beloved.

**Idol.** In a negative sense, anything that stands between an individual and God. In an opposite, ironic sense, “idol” can also refer to the Beloved or God.

**Ka‘ba.** The cubic structure at Mecca, covered with a black cloth, that is the destination of pilgrimage and marks the direction of prayer (*qibla*) for Muslims. According to tradition, it was originally established by Adam and rebuilt by Abraham and his son Ishmael. In the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Ka‘ba had been filled with idols by the tribes of Arabia. By removing the 360 idols, Muḥammad reestablished the Ka‘ba as a symbol of monotheism and Divine Unity.

**Knowledge.** Sufis differentiate between acquired, rational knowledge (*‘ilm*) and mystical knowledge (*ma‘rifā*). The term used by Persian writers for mystical knowledge is *‘irfān*, and one who possesses such knowledge is an *‘ārif*—a gnostic, mystic, or Sufi.



**Mirror.** A Sufi symbol of the human heart, which when polished and purified from the rust of egoism reflects the light of God. Other important “mirrors” include human nature in general (Adam, the archetype of humanity, was created in the image of God) and the universe, in which the attributes of the divine are reflected.

**Most Beautiful Names** (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*). According to the Qur'ān, “to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.” These names, traditionally numbered at ninety-nine, denote divine attributes and include such titles as “the Merciful,” “the Living,” “the Loving,” “the Light,” and so on. Allāh, the Supreme Name, is not included in the list.

**Moth.** The lover drawn to the light of the Beloved. The moth's sacrifice of itself in the candle's flame is an instance of annihilation under the spell of love.

**Oneness** (*tawḥīd*). “Divine Unity.” The acceptance and affirmation of the Oneness of God. The most central belief in Islam, for Sufis it usually leads to a belief in the Unity of Being (*see below*).

**Permanence** (*baqā'*). “Remaining,” “abiding,” or “subsistence.” After the passing away of the conditioned self in annihilation, *baqā'* is the discovery of the abiding, permanent quality of the true self, which exists through God. The term entered Sufism from the Qur'ān, 55:26:

“All on earth will pass away, but the Face of the Lord will remain forever.”

**Posteternity** (*abad*). Eternity without end. For some Sufis, posteternity is another name for permanence, or *baqāʾ*. See also pre-eternity.

**Prayer niche** (*miḥrāb*). The heart-shaped arch in a mosque that indicates the direction of prayer, facing the Kaʿba. In Sufi poetry, the arch of the beloved’s eyebrow often becomes the *miḥrāb*.

**Pre-eternity** (*azal*). Eternity without beginning; that which exists before the creation of time and the world, pre-eternity is often coupled with posteternity (*abad*). The relationship between pre-eternity and posteternity is analogous to the relationship between annihilation and permanence.

**The Real** (*al-ḥaqq*). Ultimate Reality, or “the Truth.” One of the most common names for God and the divine level of reality in Sufi literature.

**Rind**. A “spiritual libertine” or “rogue.” Impossible to translate with a single word, a *rind* is liberated from outward social conventions but inwardly possesses a saint-like nature that is beyond reproach.

**Samāʿ**. “Spiritual Audition” or the “Spiritual Concert.” A practice during Sufi gatherings that employs music and

the recitation of poetry as a form of mystical remembrance of the divine. Sometimes movement or dance is involved, as in the turning of the whirling dervishes.

**The Sea.** Absolute being and unity.

**Sufi.** A follower of the mystic path who seeks purification of the self and experiential knowledge of the divine.

**Tavern** (*kharābāt*). The place of “ruins”; the gathering place where spiritual wine is served to *rinds* or Sufis.

**Two Worlds.** This world and the next. The phrase “the two worlds” is commonly used in Sufi poetry to denote everything that exists.

**Unity of Being.** The teaching of Ibn al-‘Arabī (1165–1240) that the entire universe, and everything that exists, is a manifestation of God. This does not mean that the universe is God, but that everything manifested is an aspect of God’s existence.

**Veil.** In the same way that the divine is mirrored in the world, it is also veiled and hidden. One of the terms for coming to know God directly is “unveiling” (*kashf*). There is also an Islamic belief that if all the veils of manifestation were lifted, a person gazing directly on the face of God would be annihilated.

**Water of Life.** Located in darkness, the Fountain of Life is associated with the mysterious figure Khidr, the Islamic “Green Man” — a cross between a prophet, saint, and bestower of spiritual initiations. Khidr achieved immortality from the Fountain of Life.

**Wine.** Overwhelming love.

**World-viewing Cup.** A miraculous cup, like a magic mirror, that allows its possessor to see the entire world by gazing into its depths. According to legend, it was possessed by the ancient Persian king Jam. In Sufi symbolism, it is associated with the purified heart.



## Notes

- p. 3, INVISIBLE CARAVANS | *Love's concert is calling, but the flute can't be seen*: literally, "All men are in *samā'*, but the flute can't be seen." For *samā'*, see glossary.
- p. 5, THE SAME LANGUAGE | Excerpt from Rūmī, *Mathnawī* I, 1205–1207.
- p. 7, STONE HEARTS | *the Spiritual Concert*: literally, *samā'*.
- p. 13, THE GLOW OF YOUR PRESENCE | Excerpt from Ḥāfiz, *Ghazal* 22.
- p. 14, EVERY DIRECTION | *why aim your prayers at only one spot?*: a reference to the *qibla*, the direction of prayer at Mecca.
- p. 17, THE PATHWAY FINALLY OPENED | *freed from both belief and from disbelief*: belief and disbelief can both be seen as forms of idolatry. The idea that God is beyond belief and disbelief is a common theme in Sufi mystical poetry.
- p. 18, THE KING'S ROYAL FALCON | *daring*: in Persian, *jānbāz*, "reckless" or "willing to risk one's life."

- p. 21, THE SUFI'S CAP | Excerpt from Sa'dī, *Gulistān*, book 2, story 15. *What's the use of those woolen robes and the Sufi's cloak?*: for some dervishes, the patched robe (*khirqā*) and other types of clothing worn by initiates became sources of spiritual pride.
- p. 22, ESSENCE AND FORM | In the original Persian, this is a very abstract, metaphysical poem, in which the divine essence (*dhāt*) is contrasted with the attributes (*ṣifāt*). The last line of our translation is literal, and the other lines convey the sense of the original. For *essence* and *attributes*, see glossary.
- p. 25, THE GREATEST NAME | *We are the Treasure whose spell is the world*: in a traditional Sufi saying God said, "I was a hidden treasure who wished to be known, so I created the world." The word we have translated as "spell" is *ṭilism* or "talisman," a magical image or charm.  
| *The Greatest Name* (*ism-i a'ẓam*) or the Supreme Name: Allāh.  
The poem expresses the view that humanity—Adam—was made in the image of God and is a mirror of the divine essence and attributes. The poet, Maghribī, was influenced by the ideas of Ibn al-'Arabī.
- p. 28, REALITY AND APPEARANCE | *There is a difference between real love and the love of appearances*: literally, "there is a difference between real love (*'ishq-i haqīqī*) and metaphorical love (*'ishq-i majāzī*)." The meaning of this is that there is a difference between divine love for God and "metaphorical love" for a human being. At the same time, the Sufis maintained that human love can be a direct gateway to love of the divine. As the saying goes, "The apparent is a bridge to the Real." See Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (Oxford: One World, 2001), pp. 68–69.

- p. 29, HUNDREDS OF WAYS | *There are hundreds of ways to kneel in prayer — hundreds of ways to open toward the heart of the Friend's beauty*: literally, “There are a hundred kinds of prayer (*nāmāz*), bowing (*rukūʿ*), and prostration (*sujūd*) for the one whose prayer niche (*miḥrāb*) is the beauty of the Friend.”
- p. 33, THE WIND AT DAWN | *From before-the-beginning to beyond-the-last*: for *pre-eternity* and *posteternity*, see glossary.
- p. 34, NOT WHAT WE THOUGHT | *The Water of Life is in this very house — but still, we need to drink it*: literally, “That Fountain from which Khidr drank the Water of Life is in our home, but we’ve bottled it up.” For *water of life*, see glossary.
- p. 37, ONE AND MANY | *The essence is one, but the attributes many*: see *essence* and *attributes* in glossary.
- p. 38, REMEMBER THE TRUTH | *If you hear those two words, then remember the Truth*: literally, “if you hear those two words, then remember the ego” (and then remember the Truth, by forgetting yourself).
- p. 39, THIS SORROW | In Persian poetry, the term “sorrow” or “your sorrow” is often used for “love” or “your love,” respectively.
- p. 42, TAVERN DWELLERS | *The pure-hearted Sufis no longer care to exist*: literally, “The *rind* no longer inclines toward existence.” For *rind*, see glossary.
- p. 43, KNOWLEDGE | *The path of knowledge*: literally, “the path of *gnōsis*” (*maʿrifā*).
- p. 46, THE HIDDEN SUN | *The heavenly spheres have lost their way in your amazement. Bewildered and wondering, they forever turn before your door*. ‘Attār is describing how the



stars and the entire celestial sphere revolve around the one point of the Pole Star. This beautiful passage parallels the idea of some Greek philosophers that the movement of the heavenly spheres is caused by their contemplation and desire to return to the First Cause — and Dante's idea that love is the power that moves the stars.

- p. 47, THE HEART'S HOUSE | A free translation from Rūmī, *Mathnawī* II, 3129–32.
- p. 53, FIND IT IN YOU | *The Divine Book*: the creative pattern from which the world is fashioned.
- p. 54, LIFT THE VEIL | According to a tradition of Islamic mysticism, “Were His face unveiled, the glories of His face would burn whatever His vision reached.”
- p. 56, RUINED | *prayer niche* (see glossary). In Sufi poetry, the curve of the beloved's eyebrow becomes the prayer niche.
- p. 59, WITHOUT YOU | *celestial lake*: literally, *Kawthar*, a river or fountain of paradise mentioned once in the Qur'ān (108:1); it means “abundance.”
- p. 60, SERVICE | Not a poem, but a famous saying from Sa'dī's *Bustān*, book 1, story 5.
- p. 61, THE MISSING SUN | This poem probably refers to the absence of Shams of Tabriz; *Shams* means “sun” in Arabic. The term *circle of love* means “the circle of dervishes.”
- p. 62, WE WERE TOGETHER | Here *idol* refers to God, and *we can't exist without him* is a clever pun.  
| *that ancient Night of Union*: the primordial banquet of The Day of *Alast* (see glossary), when souls established their covenant with God. From that wine drunk in preexistence, “before the grape was created,” the souls are drunk until the end of time.

- p. 63, BEYOND DISTINCTIONS | *belief and disbelief*: see note to the poem “The Pathway Finally Opened,” p. 199.  
| *Love’s Prophet is beyond race, beyond creeds, beyond petty distinctions*: literally, “Love’s Prophet is neither Persian nor Arab.”
- p. 66, CHECKMATE | This poem, by a twentieth-century Persian poet, shows the abiding influence of the Sufi tradition. References to the game of chess were often made in classical Sufi poetry.
- p. 68, TAKE A LOOK THERE | *People of Heart*: a name for Sufis.
- p. 71, THE VISION OF YOUR FACE | *Your love, from before the beginning of time*: that is, from *azal*, or pre-eternity. This poem by Sulṭān Walad (1226–1312), the son of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, is a recollection of gazing on the face of the Beloved before the creation of the world.
- p. 72, THE MIRROR AND ITS CASE | *Each soul is created to serve as your mirror*: literally, “The purpose of the existence of humanity and the jinn is a mirror.” The Qur’ān states that human beings and the jinn were created for the sole purpose of worshipping God (51:56). One of the companions of the Prophet, ‘Abdallāh Ibn ‘Abbās, explained that the word *worship*, in this case, means “to know God.” The jinn are genies, inhabitants of the subtle world.
- p. 76, ACTION | The image of an ass who carries a load of books but doesn’t benefit from them appears in the Qur’ān 62:5.
- p. 77, TRADING IN LOVE’S CURRENCY | Excerpt from Rūmī, Ghazal 132; the complete *ghazal* appears in appendix 2.
- p. 78, THE BUBBLE | *Pass away and eternal shore*: *fanā’* and *baqā’*, respectively. For *annihilation* and *permanence*, see glossary.

- p. 82, THE SUN AND THE SHADOW | *erased*: *mahw*, another term for *fanā'*.
- p. 87, BETWEEN TWO BREATHS | The author of this quatrain, the famous philosopher-scientist Avicenna (980–1037), was also the author of several spiritual allegories about the journey of the soul.
- p. 89, DON'T IMAGINE | *wayfarer*: Arabic, *sālik*; a “traveler” on the spiritual path; a Sufi.
- p. 90, DON'T UTTER A SOUND | *nightingale*: a symbol of the lover, drawn to the rose of the Beloved. In the same way that the flame draws the moth to it, the eternal beauty of the rose attracts the nightingale and inspires it to song. While the moth ignores the danger of the flame, the nightingale ignores the danger of the thorns.
- p. 92, YOUR GENEROSITY | *who needs to ask the sun* [shams] *for its light?* An allusion to Shams of Tabriz.
- p. 101, CREATION MYTH | *Made moist with love's dew, Adam's soil became clay*: according to the Qur'ān, Adam was molded out of clay (or matter) and imbued with the spirit (*rūh*) of God. For the Persian poets, the word *Adam* also means “humankind.”
- p. 104, EVERY PLACE IS LOVE'S HOME | Excerpt from Ḥāfiz, Ghazal 78.
- p. 106, BURNT | Nothing is known about the author, but his name, Qīrī, appropriately enough, means “hot tar.”
- p. 108, THE SECRET IS HIDDEN | *the Divine Secret is hidden*: the secret (*sirr*) is also hidden in the human being. In Sufi teachings, the *sirr* is the innermost awareness in the heart, which is a human being's link with the divine.  
| *Like the Fountain of Life, it's hidden in darkness*: see glossary, *water of life*. The Fountain of Life was said to

reside in a “dark land.” According to one account, it was located in the north, under the Pole Star, where the sun doesn’t rise. When a dead, salted fish fell into the water, it sprang back to life and helped Khidr to discover the Fountain of Life. In this way, “the Water of Life arrived unsought.”

- p. 112, DUST ON YOUR DOORSTEP | Ḥāfiẓ, excerpt from Ghazal 34. *My soul is just the dust on your doorstep*: the phrase “dust on your doorstep,” common in Ḥāfiẓ and other poets, denotes the ultimate spiritual surrender of the lover. According to one definition, “Sufism is to stay at the door of the Beloved even if you are driven away.” The doorway is a threshold to another way of perception.
- p. 119, SEEKING YOU TOO | *on the very first day*: in pre-eternity, before the creation of the world.  
 | *with true promise*: the Persian word translated as “promise” is *paymān*, which also means “treaty” or “covenant.” This one word supplies a key to the entire poem, showing that it’s about the Day of Alast (see glossary) or the “day of covenant.”  
 | *O Seeker!* A play on the name of the poet, who is being addressed here. His name, Ṭālib, means “seeker.”
- p. 125, ACHIEVE THE STATE | *you must move from speech to the inner state. You won’t become one just by chanting “Unity”*: this poem may be a critique of the Sufi meditative practice of repeating divine names in Arabic using a rosary (*tasbīḥ*). As long as it involves repeating words without a change in spiritual state (*ḥāl*), the practice remains questionable.
- p. 132, THE MIRROR AND THE SUN | A literal translation of the second half of the quatrain: *At that moment when the sun shines at the mirror, if the mirror does not say “I am the sun,” what else should it do?* This is almost certainly a reference to

the fate of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (857–922). In a moment of mystical ecstasy and effacement, he uttered the line “I am the Truth” (*al-ḥaqq*, “the Real,” a name of God), for which he was put to death.

- p. 133, FACES | *human beings are the face of God*: the “face” is the most intimate aspect of something. In Islamic mysticism, “Adam”—humanity—is made in God’s image, mirroring the essence and attributes of the divine.
- p. 134, TAKE A CLOSER LOOK | *The Real said to you, “I’m wherever you turn”*—*So why don’t you take a closer look at yourself?* Qur’ān 2:115: “Wherever you turn, there is the face of God.”
- p. 137, THE WORLD-VIEWING CUP | See glossary.
- p. 140, KEEP ME FREE | *forget the wine and the cup*: literally, “I am free from wine and cup.”  
| *let’s sell the farm*: literally, “I am free from seed and trap.”
- p. 142, EMPTINESS | “*when poverty becomes complete, you find God*”: an Arabic saying quoted by Sufi writers.
- p. 144, IT WOULD BE ME | *Crazy yet learned—Scoundrel yet saint*: This poem celebrates the idea of the *rind*, or “spiritual libertine”: one who has become free of social conventions but remains spiritually pure within.
- p. 145, SILENCE | *Drink the wine of mystic knowledge, but don’t then forget to keep your lips closed. It’s never a good time to sell the Divine Secret!*: when Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj said *Anā al-ḥaqq*—I am the Real—he uttered the divine secret.
- p. 148, BLIND AS A BAT | *Divine Oneness: tawḥīd*. For *oneness*, see glossary.

- p. 149, LOST IN CELEBRATION | *we are now victorious in love!*: literally, “we are victorious.” A play on the name of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj—*maṣṣūr* means “victorious.”
- p. 156, WITHOUT YOUR PRESENCE | Excerpt from Ḥāfiz, Ghazal 29.
- p. 160, SWEEP OUT THE STABLE | *Sweep out the stable of your existence and the king will gladly enter*: literally, “sweep out the *khargāh* (tent or pavilion) of your existence.” We have translated *khargāh* as “stable” because of its resonance with the Persian word for donkey (*khar*).
- p. 161, CREATION’S WITNESS | An elaboration on the Islamic mystical saying “I was a Hidden Treasure that wished to be known, so I created the world.”
- p. 167, ONE BODY | This poem by Sa’dī (*Gulistān*, book 1, story 10) is inscribed at the entrance to the Hall of Nations at the United Nations building in New York.
- p. 171, CLEAR WINE | *Most Beautiful Names*: see glossary.
- p. 173, BE LIKE THE OCEAN | Quatrain and line of commentary from Sa’dī, *Gulistān*, book 2, story 40.



## Index of Authors

Because quatrains were widely quoted by Sufi authors but rarely “signed” by the original writer, some quatrains “wander” throughout collections of Sufi literature and are attributed to more than one author. Biographical information about the more well-known writers can be found in John Renard’s *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005). When known, years for the death of the more well-known authors are given using European, common era dates, though some dates are approximate. For sources of the individual poems, see the translators’ website.

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